

SEPTEMBER 2013

America's opinions of occupations

Jacob Galley

A recent study offers a glimpse into the way American adults perceive the contribution to society of 10 selected occupational groups. The results, reported in "[Public esteem for military still high](#)" (Pew Research Center, July 11, 2013), show that members of the military are held in the highest regard; 78 percent of respondents to the spring 2013 survey said that military personnel contribute "a lot" to society's well being, compared with 84 percent 4 years earlier. Next highest on the 2013 list in terms of contributing "a lot" to society were teachers (72 percent), medical doctors (66 percent), scientists (65 percent), and engineers (63 percent).

At the bottom of the list of 10 selected occupations were lawyers. Only 18 percent of survey respondents reported that lawyers contribute "a lot" to society.

Among the remaining occupational groups, clergy were seen as contributing "a lot" to society by 37 percent of respondents, artists by 30 percent, journalists by 28 percent, and business executives by 24 percent.

The survey also investigated how opinions vary by demographic group. Among non-Hispanic Whites, 81 percent believed that the military contributed a lot to society, compared with 72 percent for Hispanics and for non-Hispanic Blacks. Republicans and Republican-leaning independents (86 percent) were more likely than Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents (75 percent) to say that the military contributed a lot. In contrast, there were 4 or fewer percentage points of variation in opinions across age, gender, and educational attainment groups regarding the military.

The study found the largest decline in how the public views journalists. The portion of the population that said journalists contribute a lot to society decreased by 10 percentage points. This decline was primarily the result of a change in women's views. The percentage of women who said journalists contribute "a lot" decreased by 17 percentage points from 2009 to 2013, compared with a decline of just 2 percentage points among men.

The results of the survey were similar to those of the 2012 General Social Survey, which asked adults about their confidence in the leaders of various types of institutions.

The surveys were conducted by telephone interviews of U.S. adults in all 50 states and Washington, D.C. The 4,006 participants included in the sample were contacted by landline and cell random digit dial. The survey had a margin of error of ± 2.1 percent.